Shri Ram Memorial Lectures

VIII

SANSKRIT THEATRE

KAMALESH DATTA TRIPATHI



Shri Ram Centre for Performing Arts

आदरणीय सुहृद भाई प्रोफ़ेसर
नवजीवन रस्तोगी के लिए
— कमलेशदत्त त्रिपाठी
24.6.

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INTRODUCTION

It has been our continuous, endeavour to document the life and works of eminent theatre personalities. Furthering the same ethos we are hereby publishing the lectures of Prof. K.D. Tripathi, who is one of the greatest votaries on Sanskrit Drama tradition of our country.

An internationally acclaimed Scholar on *Āgama Śāstras* and Indian philosophy, Shri Tripathi has done pioneering research work on *Nāṭya-śāstra.* In the present lectures "Sanskrit Theatre" he delineates the finer aspects of *Nāṭya, Abhinaya,* music in the light of *Nāṭya-śāstra* and other classical treatises.

I hope his inter-disciplinary approach to Indian drama, dramaturgy and music prove to be of valuable interest to all theatre lovers and readers.

PANNA BHARAT RAM
Executive Vice President

LECTURE - I

THE AESTHETICS OF SANSKRIT THEATRE AND THE STRUCTURE OF SANSKRIT DRAMA

Background and Introduction

Sanskrit theatre has emerged to occupy the central place in contemporary theatre movement in recent decades. Growing interest of the scholars in the performance of Sanskrit plays is clearly discernible. The search for the identity of Indian theatre which started in the 6th decade of this century culminated in a serious inquiry into traditional folklore of India as well as classical Sanskrit Theatre.

The introduction of Kālidāsa's Śākuntalam to the western world at the close of 18th century generated keen interest in Indian thought in general and in Indian literature and arts in particular. Likewise, the discovery that Bhāsa's plays were being preserved and performed in the living tradition of the Sanskrit theatre in Kerala directed the attention of scholars towards the performative aspect of Sanskrit plays.

The publication of Bharata's Nāṭya-śāstra complete with 'Abhinava-bhāratī' in Baroda in 1964 coincides with a fresh interest of theatremen and artists not only in Nāṭya-śāstra itself, but also in Sanskrit plays, Kuḍiyāṭṭam and numerous forms of traditional folk theatre scattered throughout India.

The Nāṭya-śāstra (hereafter NŚ) is an encyclopaedic compendium of ancient Indian theatre. It covers a wide range of artistic subjects such as music, dance, aesthetics, architecture and draws upon disciplines as diverse as philosophy, psychology, myth, ritual, grammar, phonetics, geography. Bharata has been regarded as the preceptor (ācārya) of Nāṭya (Drama and Theatre) as well as of Kāvya-śāstra (Poetics). He inherited the traditions of Brahmā and Sadāśiva and

perhaps, that of Viṣṇu, which are direct antecedents of Bharata's Nāṭya-śāstra.[1]

The Tradition

Historically, there were attempts to systematize the tradition of theatre even before Bharata. Pānini, the grammarian of 5th or 6th century B.C., speaks of the Manual for Actors (Naṭa-sūtra) by Śilālin and Kṛśāśva (4.4.3.110, 111). Besides, we are aware of the continuity of a dance and theatrical tradition in India from the earliest period for which we have records.

The danseuse figurine from Indus valley civilization, and the term for danseuse (nṛtu) in the early Ṛgvedic hymns, as well as the term for actor (Śailūṣa) in Śukla Yajurveda (30.6) and Taittirīya Brāhmaṇa (3.4.2.1) testify to a tradition of performance from the 4th millennium B.C. It shows at this early era the existence of a spontaneous theatrical tradition, which had yet been codified. The word 'Naṭa' used in this context links the art of acting to the art of dancing. Both words 'Naṭa' and 'Śailūṣa' appear in the Rāmāyaṇa (2.30.8), which speaks of a Śailūṣa's wife, an actress, who played various roles. The Mahābhāṣya of Patañjali (2nd century B.C.) refers to an actress (Naṭa-bhāryā) as well as theatrical performance.

Buddhist sources also refer to a flourishing theatrical tradition. There is mention of a village of actors and their chief, the 'naṭa-grāmaṇī'. In the 'Gāmaṇī Saṁyutta' (Discourse to Headmen, (*Saṁyutta Nikāya,* 4.2), a chief of the actors submits to Lord Buddha the common belief stated by Bharata at the end of NŚ that actors attain merit that help them reach heaven. V. Raghavan maintains that this chief is certainly the 'Sūtradhāra' or, the director of the performance whose name, Talapuṭa, underlines dance as forming part of drama. This passage refers also to the stage (raṅga) and the assembly (Samāja), where and for whom, the performance takes place (raṅga-majjhe', 'samajja-majjhe').[2]

In Pali, a significant term occurs that describes the nature of stage reality as 'true false' (sajjālīka' = skt. styālīka'). A deeper ontological inquiry into the nature of theatre emerges in the NŚ and its commentary. The *Brahma jāla-suttanta* of the Dīgha Nikāya first refers to the practice of discourse on various arts, crafts, games, pastimes and schools of philosophical thoughts current among the Brāhmaṇas. The word used here for the plays is 'pekkhā', or 'prekṣā', in later Sanskrit writings. A pastime known as 'Sobhanāgāraka' identified by Patañjali as *'Śobhanaka'*, a form of theatrical art, has also been mentioned there.[3]

Such is the background of the NŚ. This unique tradition of Nāṭya and an excellent school of Nāṭyasāstric exposition has been preserved in the Abhinava-bhāratī, Bhāva-prakāśana, Saṅgīta-ratnākara and the commentaries of Kallinātha as well as Siṁhabhūpāla thereon. According to Indian Śāstric tradition, every Śāstra (discipline) was first composed in Sūtra, the most concise presentation of the disciplines in an aphoristic style, and was later developed by the 'Vārtika', 'Vṛtti' and 'Bhāṣya' (different forms of commentary). For instance, there is the tradition of Pāṇinian grammar where Pāṇini is the author of Sūtras, Kātyāyana is the author of Vārtikas and Patañjali composed the Bhāṣya, whereas Kāśikā is the well-known Vṛtti on Pāṇini.

Similarly, the 'Sūtras' (aphorism in prose form) and 'Kārikās' (versified aphorisms) of Bharata found an author of 'Vārtika' in Harṣa and an author of 'Vivṛti' or a commentary in Abhinavaguptapādācārya. The words of Udbhaṭa, Kīrtidhara, Bhaṭṭa Yantra, Bhaṭṭa Lollaṭa, Śrī Saṅkuka and Bhaṭṭa Nāyaka, Bhaṭṭa Tota, to name a few, were also in the form of commentaries. They are all now lost. Whatever little has been preserved in the form of prima facie views and references to earlier works, in the Abhinava-bhāratī, Bhāva-prakāśana and Saṅgīta-ratnākara is of immense help in understanding the tradition of the NŚ and its diverse interpretations. Sometimes

large passages and even a full chapter has been reproduced from the earlier works. For instance, Hemacandra reproduces numerous passages from Abhinava-bhāratī and Kallinātha, copiously quotes from Kohala on 'Vartanā' and 'Cārī'. Thus an uninterrupted school of Nāṭya-śāstric tradition has been preserved from circa 2nd century B.C. to 15th century A.D., and even after. The regional texts written between 15th century to 18th century carry forward the tradition and diffuse it in multiple streams of Indian classical folk theatre, and dance forms. From Abhinavagupta to the most recent Śāstric texts, a living and creatively diversified tradition of 'prayoga' (performance) has been preserved and expanded by registering the views of different 'ācāryas' and incorporating innumerable 'sampradāyas' (schools). It is not simply an exercise of preserving a fossilised tradition; but rather it is a magnificent effort of carrying forward the tradition which pulsates with life and to which everyone has to make his or her own contribution.

Nature of 'Nāṭya'

Such a long and rich tradition of 'prayoga' (performance) as well as 'Śāstra (Discipline of Theatre) envisages not only a systematic and complete codification of the 'body language', but some deeper thinking on the nature of theatre and aesthetic experience.

The myth of the origin of Nāṭya and the story of the first dramatic performance occurring in the first chapter of the NŚ are important from this angle. In particular, the failure of the First Performance whose theme was the defeat of Daityas (Demons) is significant.

Angry as they were, Asuras and Dānavas (Demons) created troubles during the first dramatic performance. The objection against the performance raised by Virūpākṣa, together with the host of the Daityas and Vighnas (obstacles) has got deep implications. The Daityas said to Brahmā, "This knowledge of theatre which your lordship has created at the behest of gods, has humiliated us. Oh

Pitāmaha of the entire world, this ought not to have been done by you in this way."

The first performance was of the nature of 'anukṛti' (Imitation) and it is apparent that the Daityas took the 'anukṛti' too literally. Brahmā tried to remove the demons' misgivings about the nature of Nāṭya by describing it "as the glorious retelling of the Bhāvas, or the emotive states, of the entire triple universe."

Although Bharata defines drama as "anukaraṇa" elsewhere, Abhinavagupta emphasizes that Nāṭya is essentially "anukīrtana" (Re-telling) of the 'Bhāvas' (Emotive States) and not 'anukaraṇa', i.e. 'imitation'. Abhinavagupta raises deeper ontological and aesthetic questions when he asks whether there is a comprehension of Nāṭya as reality (tattva) or as similarly to it (sādṛśya), as in the case of a twin or as an error (bhrānti) as in the case of silver mistakingly recognized as such in a piece of mother of pearl. Or theatrical reality is the superimposition (āropa) as in the case of viewing the face of the beloved as moon, or as identification (adhyavasāya) as when one says, "This man from the land of Vāhīka is a bull." Or can we say that reality in theatre is a metaphoric supposition (utprekṣyamāṇatva) as when moon is fancied as the face of night or it is a replica (pratikṛti) as in the case of painting or a model, or as imitation or reproduction (anukaraṇa) as in the case of the intense desire of the pupil to recite the words of the Vedas as they are taught by his teacher. Or can we explain it as a sudden creation (tātkālika-nirmāṇa) as in the case of magic, or as an appearance of something (tadābhāsa) reproduced by tricks as in the case of the illusion created by a sleight-of-hand?[4] Abhinavagupta offers a number of options mentioned above to explain ontologically the nature of 'Nāṭya' and denies all such hypotheses for three reasons:

(1) Firstly, if we take 'Nāṭya' as real or in the form in any such option as stated above, the spectator (draṣṭṛ) would lose his interest in the theatrical spectacle, for a spectator cannot be expected to have

interest in that which does not concern him. How can the spectator have an interest in the 'real Rāma' being present on the stage unless there is some common ground which relates both i.e. the spectator and the 'real Rāma'. What is true in the case of the hypothesis of taking 'Nāṭya' as 'Real', is also true in case of other hypotheses. If the theatrical persona is taken to be 'Real' or likeness to the real or in any other way mentioned above, there would be no scope for 'depersonalization' or 'universalisation' (sādhāraṇīkaraṇa), of the dramatic characters, environment in which the characters have been placed in drama and the 'emotive states' represented in it. Moreover, there would be no possibility of relishing 'Rasa', due to the lack of 'depersonalisation' or 'universalisation'.

(2) Secondly, when a poet has been bound to a description tied by any of these aspects, poetry is likely to suffer, for if a poet/ playwright or an artist takes the theatre as the reproduction of reality, or even something similar to it, he is not able to chisel out the flawless piece of art due to the very 'fixity' of the nature of the objects to be represented in theatre and other art forms. The very freedom of the poet, playwright, and artist is severely delimited, if we take 'Art' as an 'Imitation' or as 'Super-imposition' etc.

(3) Thirdly, the performer's vision of art, which is essential to theatre, wouldn't find its accomplishment, for he (the performer) would be involved in the most basic of the actual feelings of ordinary life, such as rage or indulgence etc., as it usually happens at the sight of a couple engaged in love making (the onlooker may be filled with the sense of indignation or indulgence etc.). And if so, the performer engrossed with his own personal experience would not be able to represent the reality of life. The fault of Daityas lies in the fact that they took the 'Nāṭya' as identical with any one of the hypotheses stated above.

Abhinavagupta singles out the concept of 'anukaraṇa' in his brilliant analysis and argues that imitation (anukaraṇa) amounts to

be a farcial and comic copy of the 'real'. Therefore, it is essentially a distortion (vikaraṇa). It makes the indifferent one simply laugh and may cause indignation in those who belong to the side of the imitated one.

The reproduction of figures like Rāma, who belong to hoary past, is simply impossible. Neither can someone similar to Rāma be produced nor can the actor reproduce his own sorrow just like to that of Rāma, because it is absolutely absent in him. Moreover, if it were actually present in him, his performance would fail to be a reproduction. Thus, the theory of 'anukaraṇa' stands totally rejected. If principal prima facie view of 'Anukaraṇa' is rejected, then all such similar views are automatically rejected.[5]

Nāṭya is, therefore, an 'anukīrtana' of the 'Bhāvas'. It is not a 'reproduction' in its stricted sense, rather it is a representation in the form of 'retelling'. This 'retelling' is not that of an actual event. On the contrary, it is the re-telling of the 'Bhāva' (emotive state) underlying that particular event.

(i) The term 'anukīrtana' means firstly 'telling' or 'narrating', rather than 'imitating', making and 'reproducing' things or emotive states. It is in no way an exercise in creating an illusion of the real. This creative aspect of re-telling the Bhāvas entails endless ways of describing ('varṇanā') the life and the world (trailokya-svabhāva), for 'kīrtana' means repeated telling, reciting, and describing.

(ii) Secondly, the act of reverberating the 'Bhāvas', 'loka-svabhāva', and 'trailokya' belongs to the order of extolling them. It is not merely re-stating the real, it is the retelling of the real, in order to glorify it. This retelling or 'anukīrtana' captures the essential meaning of the original more powerfully than 'imitation'.

(iii) Thirdly, it is the creative act of the artist/poet/dramatist and of the performer exercising his freedom to avoid whatever he deems fit to be avoided (heya) and to incorporate what is to be adopted (upādeya).[6]

'Kīrtana' etymologically includes all the three meanings but the most important is the idea that it is not an imitational reproduction, but a reverberative representation. An artist does not re-create 'Reality'. At the best, he 're-tells' it in a glorious way. 'Kīrtana', in course of time, acquired another more specific meaning, that of 'raising a temple or a monument' in order to celebrate an auspicious or favourable occasion.[7]

This meaning of celebration is abundantly present in the sense of 'anukīrtana'.

One may be a bit careful, though 'anukīrtana' may be rendered here as a 'Representation' or imaging or mimicking, there is some qualification which makes realize the immense underlying difference between the Aristotelian and Indian concepts.[8]

The concept of 'anukīrtana' is deeply rooted in the Vedic and Āgamic idea of 'Yajña' and 'Vāk'.

Kapila Vatsyayan has underlined the Vedic background of the Nāṭya-śāstra in her article on 'Dance or movement techniques of Sanskrit theatre' appearing in the book entitled 'Sanskrit Drama in Performance' and in her own celebrated book "The Square and the Circle of the Indian Art" as well as in the paper entitled "The Indian Arts Their Ideational Background and the Principals of Form" appearing in the work entitled "Rūpa Pratirūpa".[9] Earlier F.B.J. Kuiper, a well-known Dutch scholar and M.C. Byrski, the well-known Polish scholar did remarkable work in this direction. Kapila Vatsyayan maintains, "In enunciating his theory and in evolving a grammar of Artistic expression, Bharata undoubtedly accepted the organic world view inherent in the earlier speculative thought and the ritual. He brings together into one fold the essentials of this speculative thought, particularly the complex system of establishing correspondences between the limbs and the organs of human body, the senses and aspects of cosmos as also the methodology (the Vidhi) of the Brāhmaṇas, where earth, space, time are consecrated to suggest

a cosmic order and the repetitive rhythm of cosmic time. He enunciates another path of experiencing the Brahman or Formless through the world of manyfold names and form (Nāma and Rūpa)."[10] She further elaborates the idea and states that "the imagery of Upaniṣads which contain metaphysical ideas is translated into an actual technique of using limbs and organs of the human body and the senses with the objective of establishing correspondences between them and impersonalised states of being. Bharata thus developes a system wherein the very language of name and form (Nāma and Rūpa) evokes that beyond form or without form (Pararūpa and Arūpa), however momentarily."[11]

Āgamas also share the Vedic view of universe and man and emphasize the 'śakti' or 'kriyā' (creative) aspect of consciousness in order to explain the riddle more satisfactorily. For example, the primal creative act has been explained in the following words in Non-dualistic Kashmir Śaivism:

"Śiva intent on creativity in the form of expansion by the means of energy of the great 'mantra' of supreme primal word, viz. the perfect 'I' in union with 'Śakti' in whom the urge of expansion is explicit and in whom abounds the bloom of compactness of their energy, becomes engaged in the act of creative expansion."[12]

The Āgamas try to explain the process of mundane as well as aesthetic and spiritual experience in terms of 'Śakti' or potentiality and energy or the activity arising from our 'Freedom'. Thus creation and activity, being an activity, may be explained in terms of Vedic 'yajña' as well as Āgamic 'kriyā'.

Indian aesthetic tradition views art as the 'manifestation' of the 'unmanifest', which is an act involving the entire cosmos. Thus Pannikar maintains that "It is neither a merely divine affair, nor a purely human endeavour, nor a blind cosmic process; it is human, divine and cosmic—all in one. This reveals the inter-relation and the unity of the cosmos."[13]

The Nāṭya as 'Kriyā' is creative 'anukīrtana' of the 'Bhāva'. Bharata, at the same time views, 'Nāṭya' as the 'anukaraṇa' of the 'threefold universe' and 'the seven continents' (Sapta-dvīpa). This Indian concept of 'Anukaraṇa' may be distinguished from the Greek concept of 'mimesis' in terms of its capacity to create a new world, whereas mimesis represents the world. In the Indian concept of 'anukaraṇa', "the model is forgotten as soon as the creation is complete"(Dramatic Concepts : Greek and Indian, Bharat Gupt, p.98, New Delhi, 1994). Abhinava upholds the view of his celebrated teacher, Bhaṭṭa Tauta that no recreation of the original historical 'Rāma' is possible. An actor only re-tells the historical or the present reality in traditional Indian theatre in a glorious way. Moreover, 'Nāṭya' is the celebration of reality.

Thus, Nātya may be viewed experientially as 'Rasa'. While 'anukīrtana of the 'Bhāvas' is a creative act in the sense of 'kriyā', 'Rāsa' is an experience (Anubhava) of the 'Self' as 'Vimarśana' ('I' - consciousness), the subtlest, the most intrinsic, indivisible, fundamental, fullest and purest aspect of the 'Kriyā'(activity) as 'Śakti' or Potentiality lying dormant in our consciousness.

It is an 'anuvyavasāya' (re-cognition), 'Prakāśa' (luminosity), and Ānanda (bliss) as the "'I' consciousness" characterised by such 'bhāvas' as love (rati), sorrow (śoka), etc. Hence, it is wonderful. It is known by such synonyms as relishing (rasa, rasana, āsvādana), mastication (carvaṇā), flash of wonder (camatkāra), immersion (nirveśa) and enjoyment (bhoga).

Ancient Indian culture experienced an integral view of creativity and aesthetic experience in this concept of theatre, that has its basis in the holistic view of the universe and in the circular concept of time.

It is not ultimately imitating and repeating the 'other', rather it is retelling the 'becoming'.

All particular experiences subjectively and objectively arise out of the foundational consciousness (Saṁvit) through specific ideational

determinations (adhyavasāya or vikalpa). As a result, all the experiences in arts culminate in the Rasa-experience which is an aesthetic 'I'-consciousness. This is the reason Bharata defines 'nāṭya' as expressive of kāvyārtha (Poetic meaning), i.e. Rasa, and distinguishes it from 'Pure' Nṛtta (dance) which is independent of 'kāvyārtha'. It is in this sense that 'Nṛtta' may be termed as 'non-representational' art-form and 'nāṭya' as a 'representational' one.

Bharata declares, "Nothing proceeds on the stage without reference to 'Rasa'. He and his commentators emphasize that when all the components of the drama beginning with Vibhāva (the cause of the 'emotive states' and the enviornment in which they take place), Anubhāva (the 'consequents' expressive of those 'emotive states') etc. are presented, the realisation of Rasa manifests itself in the spectator. Similarly, when any element required for the manifestation of 'Rasa' is missing, the Rasa realisation is rendered difficult, indirect, or incomplete.

Since cosmic multiplicity was created through the primordial act of sacrifice, therefore, unity may be regained through the same sacrificial act, freeing the self from its spatial and temporal limitations. The same creative act takes place in the sphere of aesthetic experience. The Sahṛdaya (aesthete) of traditional Indian art, literature and theatre attains repose in his deeper 'Self' (ātmaviśrānti) for a moment and experiences 'Rasa' after having transcended the duality of relationship seen in temporal and spatial differentiations. It is an experience in which we move beyond ordinary temporality and spatiality, an experience which begins with the awareness of the 'relationship', but ultimately transcends it. However, the experience of westerns art-forms is confined to the awareness of either affirmation or negation of a specific relationship, and is therefore entirely different from its Indian counterpart.

Art forms in which one has to transcend the temporal and spatial differentiations manifested in the world of relationship offer a very

different aesthetic experiences. Although in such act-forms, one begins with the delineation of the 'vibhāvas' (the causes or, the consequents and the 'sañcāri-bhāvas' (relatively fleeting emotions), and the 'sthāyi-bhāvas' (lasting or permanent emotions), the point of culmination is 'sādhāraṇīkaraṇa' (de-personalization, universalization) in which these 'vibhāvas' etc. neither appear belonging or not belonging to the aesthete nor belonging or not belonging to others (either an enemy or a friend or some one quite different), for there is neither affirmation nor negation of the specific relationship at the stage of universalization.

In our ordinary mundane life, emotions or feelings (bhāvas) are evoked by some one who is their āśraya or substratum and by some specific environment working as stimulus. Emotions, feelings and dispositions can be permanent or lasting, such as love and anger etc., or fleeting, such as bashfulness or envy etc. It is sometimes difficult to determine which emotions is permanent and which is fleeting. Therefore, Bharata's opinion is final in such matters. Permanent emotions are called 'sthāyi-bhāvas' and fleeting emotions are named 'sañcāri-bhāvas'. The 'sthāyi-bhāvas' are only eight or nine, while 'sañcāri-bhāvas' are thirty-three in number. The bhāvas are made known or visible to others through the 'anubhāvas' such as gestures, language and facial expressions.

When depicted, for instance, in a play, the 'cause' is known as 'vibhāva'. The one on whom emotion rests is called 'ālambana vibhāva' and the stimulating surroundings, as 'uddīpana-vibhāva'. In our ordinary life a dominant emotion is often mingled with various fleeting emotions. A pervasive portrayal of life can never have only one sentiment. One dominant emotion will always be interwoven with various fleeting emotions. In an accurate portrayal of real life, the depiction of 'vibhāvas', 'anubhāvas', 'sthāyi-bhāva' and 'sañcāri-bhāvas' are present, but it must always culminate with the unity of bhāvas, known as 'Rasa'. The means by which art attains this unity is

'sādhāraṇīkaraṇa' or 'universalization', which leads to the transcendence of the specificity of relationship, or the individuation. In this way, it paves the way for transcending time and space, and thereby for attaining the repose into one's own deeper self (ātmaviśrānti) which is indivisible and pure consciousness (cit) and bliss (ānanda). This is Rasa.

The term 'nāṭya' has been employed primarily to denote 'Rasa' and secondarily, through Lakṣaṇā, 'abhinaya' endowed with its four genres—Vācika, Āṅgika, Sāttvika and Āhārya'. 'Abhinaya' is the means for expressing the 'bhāva' and for evoking 'Rasa'. This 'abhinaya' stays in the actor or 'naṭa' and reveals the 'vibhāvas' etc. imbued in the dramatic texts. In means that the 'vibhāvas' described in the dramatic text are elaborately delineated by the actor who concretizes them into corporeal images, his 'āṅgika' or corporeal 'abhinaya'. This corporeal 'abhinaya' is usually accompanied with 'vācika' or 'speech', 'sāttvika' or emotional acting and 'āhārya' or make up, costume and (required) properties. Very often other elements are also necessary such as 'dharmī', the highly conventional or less conventional and more natural modes of representation, 'vṛtti', modes of verbal, corporeal, and emotional activity, 'svaras' the melo-dies, 'gāna' the songs, 'ātodya', the percussions and other instruments, and 'raṅga' or stage and the auditorium. Traditional Indian Theatre integrates all these elements and thus, may be termed as an 'Integral Theatre'. The aesthetic experience emerging from such a theatre is 'holistic'. It is truly an integrated, holistic theatre.

The Structure of Drama

Bharata and Abhinava distinguish 'nṛtta' from 'nāṭya'. They relate 'nāṭya' to 'rasa' and 'bhāva' as 'kāvyārtha', the ultimate poetic meaning. 'Nṛtta' is completely bereft of such poetic meaning. As such, it is related to life and termed as 'pāramārthika' (Real) by

Abhinava. However, later texts distinguish 'nṛtta' from 'nāṭya' and 'nṛtya' relating 'nāṭya' to 'rasābhinaya' and 'nṛtya' to 'bhāvābhinaya'. In earlier texts there is no distinction between 'nāṭya' and 'nṛtya', but in later texts it is found. However, all the texts agree that 'nāṭya' and 'nṛtya' both are related to 'kāvyārtha' and thereby 'rasābhinaya', whereas 'nṛtta' is independent of 'kāvya'. Thus, 'nāṭya' is 'rasa', which is the very soul of the dramatic text (pāṭhya), i.e. the text entirely composed by the playwright or handed down orally by tradition in order to be performed.

Sanskrit theatre has a long history of prewritten text. According to the myth of origin of 'nāṭya' occurring in NŚ, Brahmā created 'Nāṭya-veda' by deriving 'pāṭhya' from the 'Ṛgveda', 'gīta' from the 'Sāmaveda', 'abhinaya' from the 'Yajurveda', and 'Rasa' from the 'Atharvaveda'. He created 'Itihāsa' which remains a source for the 'pāṭhya' or the text recited, i.e. the dramatic text. The Ṛgveda has the triple 'svaras' (musical accent). This is the reason that 'pāṭhya', endowed with the 'saptasvaras' (seven melodies), is derived from the Rgveda. The 'svaras' remind us immediately of the melodic 'svaras' reaching its full development with gīta, ātodya in Sāmaveda. Hence, 'Gīta' including 'ātodya', is also derived from the 'Sāmaveda' in order to add pleasure (Rañjana) to 'Nāṭya'. 'Nāṭya' is essentially a 'kriyā' or activity in time and space.The Yajurveda is related to sacrifice, which is again, action. Therefore, the 'kriyā' that is the 'abhinaya' was derived from the Yajurveda. The accounts of the origin of Nāṭya help effect the realisation of the unity of the art and the transcending of multiplicity through 'avadhāna' (concentration, aesthetic contemplation) and ultimately through the rise of 'sattva' (the state of being in one's own 'Being'). 'Avadhāna' is needed in performing the 'śānti' and 'puṣṭi'-karmans, i.e. the religious and magical acts prescribed for 'pacification' (śānti) of the troubles and attainment of nourishing growth (puṣṭi) taught in the Atharvaveda. Hence 'rasa' is derived from the 'Atharvaveda', which cannot be

experienced without emergence of 'sattva'. 'Sattva' is aroused through concentration and aesthetic contemplation.

This myth of origin of drama makes it clear that the theatre consists in four major elements already present in Vedic tradition and 'nāṭya' emerged spontaneously from this tradition. To summarize, these basic parts of theatre are 'pāṭhya' or the dramatic text together with recitation and verbal acting, 'gīta' or the songs and percussive as well as other form of theatre music, 'abhinaya' or the acting and 'Rasa' or the ultimate aesthetic experience.

The 'pāṭhya' is the verbal body of 'naṭya'. The structural frame of the dramatic text is built through the 'Itivṛtta' or plot. This plot may be derived either from the sources like 'Itihāsa' and 'Purāṇas' or from popular tradition or even from the poet's own imagination.

Everyone embarks upon an activity with a specific objective ('kārya'). Therefore, action constitutes the basis of a plot and it is divided into five phases (avasthā)—beginning of the effort, a hope of attainment of the fruit, the frustration and then the certainty of attaining at fruit, and finally its attainment.

Including the description of the phase scheme of dramatic action, the Nāṭya-śāstra underlines that it is a universal concept applicable to each and every action. The phase scheme treats action in its temporal aspect. There is yet another concept, 'arthaprakṛti' or subject matter, which describes its texture of thickness. Elaborating the concepts of 'avasthā' and 'arthaprakṛti', M.C. Byrski maintains that the phase scheme underlines a purely linear aspect of action which it requires when seen in the perspective of time and space as the sequence of five stages. On the other hand, the concept of 'arthaprakṛti' takes into account that the time factor, important as it is, should not falsify the true character of each and every action, "for it would be naive to conceive an action which lasts, for instance five hours, the first hour would be dominated by desire, the second by an effort, the third by hope, etc. It is obvious that all these actions function simultaneously. Only at different stages different ones

come to the forefront. It is precisely the nature of the subject matter that expresses their idea."[14] The 'Arthaprakrtis' are five in number, namely 'Bīja', 'Bindu', 'Patākā', 'Prakarī' and 'Kārya'. Strictly speaking only three of the five, the germ (Bīja), the drop (Bindu) and the action (Kārya), describe the nature of main sphere of action.

These are the co-relative notions to the five phases. The Botanical image of the 'Bīja' in the subject-matter-scheme suggests development factor until its fruition. The image of 'Bindu' refers to continuity of action or its uninterrupted flow. The next two categories are known as 'Patākā', or the subsidiary plot, and 'Prakarī', or the chain of episodes in which the hero receives assistance from others bringing on first the stage of hope and then certainty of success. The course of development joins with the unfolding of the dramatic action, identified as the five junctures (Sandhi): the opening, the progression, the development, the pause and the conclusion. This is the logic of the plot structure in Sanskrit drama.

The types of heroes namely 'Dhīrodātta', 'Dhīralalita', 'Dhīroddhata' and 'Dhīraśānta', together with the types of heroines and accompanying characters, are also important in determining the structure of tenfold Sanskrit plays, i.e. 'Rūpakās'.

F.B.J. Kuiper, among others, has revealed some interesting aspects of the structure of Sanskrit theatre. In his recent work entitled 'Varuṇa and Vidūṣaka', he draws attention to the cosmogonic battle between the 'Devas' and 'Asuras' during which they not only employed normal weapons, but also verbal combat. He refers to the use of 'Vivāc' (lit. speaking variously in dispute with one another).[15] He posits a connection between this cosmogonic fight and the preliminaries (Pūrvaraṅga) of Sanskrit drama.

Byrski and Kuiper both view Sanskrit drama as the re-enactment of the cosmic creation and trace the structure of Sanskrit theatre to the re-enactment of that cosmic event. As already mentioned, there is a constant reference to 'trailokya' or 'triple universe', in defining the nature of 'nāṭya'.

The whole concept of auditorium in the NŚ and the construction of the theatre space is related to cosmogony. A host of Gods and Goddesses as well as Asuras, Rākṣasas, Yakṣas, Gandharvas, Kinnaras, Apsaras and Nāgas are worshipped and given place in the auditorium in order to protect it and the performance in it. No wonder that Sanskrit theatre had an elaborate scheme of preliminaries entitled 'Pūrvaraṅga' consisting of the elements which are 'Pāramārthika', the acts of real life, such as the Nāndī or the prayer and the other elements with the definite theatrical purpose. As Brahmā occupies the central place of the stage, so does the Sūtradhāra in the preliminaries. Sūtradhāra is accompanied by 'pāripārśvikas' or assistants in the Pūrvaraṅga. According to Kuiper, Sūtradhāra represents the creator, the two 'pāripārśvikas' represent Indra and Varuṇa. Again the hero in the drama proper represents Indra, the Vidūṣaka, Varuṇa, and the heroine, 'Sarasvatī'.[16] One may quibble over details but it cannot be denied that the Sūtradhāra, the Vidūṣaka, and the hero form the basic structure of Sanskrit drama and Sanskrit theatre. The evolution of two characters, Sūtradhāra and Vidūṣaka, determine the development of traditional Indian theatre itself.

It is interesting to observe that, in later traditional 'folk' theatre forms, we see the survival of the Sūtradhāra in a predominant way, whereas elsewhere, it is the Viduṣaka, who predominates. Mostly in 'temple theatre forms', the Sūtradhāra survives, and in the forms enacted outside the temples, the Vidūṣaka occupies the dominant place, especially when it comes to deal with changing social reality. As wit and humour have been employed in classical Sanskrit theatre in order to highlight the social contradictions so also they are used in traditional folk-theatre-forms for the same purpose.

The linguistic structure of Sanskrit drama is also very significant. The multi-language structure from the very beginning has provided a unique theatricality in Sanskrit drama. The simultaneous presence of Sanskrit, Prākṛta and even Apabhraṁśa infuses a unique theatrical

strength to Sanskrit theatre, so much so that recently even modern Indian language have found place in the structure of theatrical texts, for example, in a Kuḍiyāṭṭam performance Vidūṣaka elaborates his Prākṛta dialogue into Malayalam.

Vṛttis (modes of activities of speech, mind and body), namely Bhāratī, Sāttvatī, Ārabhaṭī and Kaiśikī also play important roles in determining the structure of Sanskrit drama. For instance, Nāṭaka and Prakaraṇa have all the vṛttis, while the rest are devoid of the delicate vṛtti. The 'Ḍima' should have only two vṛttis whereas 'Utsṛṣṭikāṅka' should be devoid of all with the exception of Bhāratī.

The number of acts is the next common distinction. The NŚ gives the exact number of acts for eight Rūpakas. Vyāyoga, Īhāmṛga, Bhāṇa, Vīthi, Utsṛṣṭikāṅka are single act play. Samavakāra is a three-act and Ḍima a four-act play. Nāṭaka as well as Prakaraṇa are composed with five to ten acts. NŚ does not specify the acts in 'Prahasana', but Abhinava maintains that Śuddha (Pure) Prahasana is a one-act play, whereas 'Saṃkīrṇa' (mixed) Prahasana consists of many acts.

We have already noticed that music was an integral part of Sanskrit theatre from the very beginning—music was added in order to provide 'pleasure' (rañjana) to 'pāṭhya'. Sanskrit drama utilises music according to the needs of theatre. NŚ speaks of the employment of 'Dhruvā'. Kālidāsa and some of the later dramatists refer to the employment of Dhruvā, but give no clues to its use in the play. The dialogues that of prose and verse continue to be integral to the dramatic structure throughout the history of Sanskrit theatre. But the integration of the music lies in the introduction of 'gāna' and 'ātodya'. It served not only to determine the pace and rhythm of the movement, gait, cāri, exit and entry, etc., but also to integrate 'lāsyāṅgas' (theatrical forms integrating pure dance and songs in them) into the body of the text. The progress of the Sanskrit theatre from 'Rūpakas' to 'Upa-rūpakas' is marked by the increasing use of music. The tendency was already present even in the time of Kālidāsa

and Harivaṅśa-purāṇa, and it gathers momentum with the passage of time. Music becomes more and more essential and 'Upa-rūpakas' often came to be called 'Saṅgītakas'. It is important to note that music and dance acquire more dominant a place in the dramatic text and theatrical structure during this entire period. Although as previously plays were written with maximal dramatic scripts, the theatre practice began to rely increasingly on musical forms. This conclusion is based on references found in the Abhinava-bhāratī and the Bhāva-prakāśana and such other texts.

A deeper study of the link between the 'Upa-rūpakas' and the surviving 'folk' dance and 'Folk-theatre-form' may throw light on the later development of Sanskrit theatre and other traditional theatrical forms. Indeed, the tendency of connecting 'folk' forms and Sanskrit play performance is very old. The directions in the name of playwright himself in 'Vikramorvaśīya', a unique play from this point of view, reveals the immense employment of musical and dance forms in the play-performance. Many terms occurring in 'Vikramorvaśīya' are not traceable either to NŚ or to later Nāṭyaśāstric texts. They appear to be taken from the popular theatre tradition of the early mediaeval period which remained in perfect harmony with NŚ. Directions given in 'Vikramorvaśīya' prove that Kālidāsa's plays have an unbroken tradition of performance upto the early mediaeval period. This detailed account and appreciation, presented in highly śāstric language employing the terminology of NŚ proves the undiluted continuity of the NŚ tradition as late as 10th century A.D. It helps to explain Abhinavagupta's intimate and deep understanding of the practical aspect of the NŚ in the following centuries. References to the performance of IV Act of Ratnāvalī in Kuṭṭanīmatam also proves the continuity of Nāṭyaśāstric tradition in premediaeval India.

Kallinātha's elaborate choreographical account of the Nāndī of 'Vikramorvaśīya' also makes it clear that not only Sanskrit plays in general, but 'Vikramorvaśīya' performances in particular continued

upto his time (mediaeval period) and that the style adopted was highly 'nṛtya'-oriented.[17]

Thus, the theatre which comes into existence at the initiative of gods headed by Indra is theatre of 'Anukīrtana', of Bhāvas and of the aesthetic experience of Rasa. It is a 'holistic theatre' consisting of a highly evolved text, pre-written as well as orally floating among the community of artists. It assimilated 'gīta', 'ātodya' fourfold abhinaya, Nṛtta, Bhāva and Rasa as its integral elements. Although the tradition of pre-written text continued, the tradition of floating oral text easily grasped by an audience fully familiar with the content of the text and the story gradually strengthened and became popular over time. This 'floating oral text' became the main vehicle for the performance by the traditional artists in the medieval period.

The theatre which has been essentially a theatre of free creative activity of 'Anukīrtana of Bhāva' and the experience of 'Rasa', has also been an object of life's diversion, namely the play which is both visual and audible. Sometimes it has been viewed as a play (krīḍā) in terms of 'Māyā', when the entire expanse of the phenomenal world is viewed as an illusion according to the 'Advaita-Vedānta'. It has also been seen as 'krīḍā' (free activity) when this grand expansion of the plurality is the manifestation of 'Śakti' (Power, Potentiality), and Svātantrya (Freedom). The latter approach towards the artistic creation and theatre occurs from an early period. The notion of Theatre as 'Līlā' is seminally present in the Nāṭya-śāstra. Somewhat later developments occur with theatre as 'Freedom' (Svātantrya) and theatre as 'repose in the self' ('svātmaviśrānti') found in Kashmir Śaivite tradition. The concept of 'Bhāvānukīrtana' and 'Rasa' occurring in NŚ seems to be fully captured in the concept of theatre as 'Play' or 'Free creative activity'.

The tradition continues uninterruptedly even in our own times. 'Imitation' and 'Conflict' and so on is not the only view of theatre. There is a powerful alternative view of theatre in Indian tradition in consonance with an equally powerful view of the universe.

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LECTURE - II

PERFORMANCE OF SANSKRIT DRAMA

Abhinaya

Nāṭya has been defined as the "Abhinaya of Rasa and Bhāva". Etymologically the term 'Abhinaya' is derived from the root √Nī to carry, with the prefix 'abhi' in the sense of towards. Hence, 'abhinaya' is the theatrical action or performance communicating 'Bhāvas' and carrying them to the spectator. These 'Bhāvas' are aroused in the hearts of a responsive audience and ultimately they are ideally transformed into 'rasas'.

Śārṅgadeva, therefore, understands Nāṭya, quite in consonance with the concept of Bharata and Abhinava, primarily as 'Rasa' and secondarily as 'abhinaya'.[1]

According to the Upanisads, as interpreted by Advaitism, Ultimate Reality which is Consciousness or the Self is pure knowledge (jñāna). It is static, and without activity (niṣkriya). It is also devoid of self-consciousness, as there is no duality. The 'Self' does not have a 'notself' to help define itself. According to the Āgamic tradition, on the contrary, consciousness (Citi or Saṁvit) as it is called, is knowledge (jñāna) and activity (kriyā), both in one, for the same consciousness is Śiva or the Self, who is again 'Śiva and Śakti', or 'Jñāna' and 'Kriyā' or again 'Prakāśa' and 'Vimarśa' all in one. Śiva is one by denotation and it is only by connotation that he is viewed as Śiva and Śakti. Śiva or consciousness is conceived as being dynamic, and the very dynamism of 'Śiva' is called 'Śakti' or 'Kriya'.[2]

This dynamism of the Self is reflected at three levels: speech, body, and mind. It may be further pointed out that such a process of externalisation involves a journey from consciousness to activity,

through desire and knowledge. Our own 'becoming' is reflected at three levels: the verbal, the bodily, and the mental activity.

This is the reason that the NŚ speaks of three intrinsic channels of 'Abhinayas' namely 'Vācika', 'Āṅgika' and 'Sāttvika' and the 'vṛttis' or modes of verbal, corporeal, and psychic behaviour in life and their expression in theatre. They are 'Bhāratī', pertaining to speech, 'Sāttvatī', pertaining to mind; and 'Kaiśikī' as well as 'Ārabhaṭī', pertaining to body. Kaiśikī refers to soft, graceful, and beautiful feminine mode of bodily activity and 'Ārabhaṭī' to a vigorous male one. In fact, Kaiśikī has a broader connotation, signifying all graceful female activity, and 'Ārabhaṭī' all manly and energetic actions. Sanskrit drama has always been understood in terms of performance or 'Prayoga', i.e. in terms of kriyā or activity. The entire Nāṭya-śāstra is an answer to a fivefold enquiry—(1) How did the NŚ come into existence; (2) For whom was it meant; (3) What are it's 'components'; (4) What are the means to comprehend the reality to be presented in theatre and to know the artistic ways to represent them; and (5) How is it put to practice? It may be observed here that the five questions culminate in the enquiry about the nature of 'practice', i.e. 'kriyā', namely 'Abhinaya'. The exposition of the fourfold 'Abhinaya' forms the largest part of the NŚ.

Moreover, whatever is extrinsically 'Abhinaya' is intrinsically 'Rasa'. Hence, while expounding the following 'padārthas' or subjects dealt within the NŚ, namely—(1) rasa, (2) bhāva, (3) abhinaya, (4) dharmī, (5) vṛtti, (6) pravṛtti, (7) siddhi, (8) svara, (9) ātodya, (10) gāna and (11) raṅga, NŚ begins with exposition of rasa, after having dealt with the questions of the origin of Nāṭya, the nature of theatrical space, dance as a part of theatre, preliminaries or 'Pūrvaraṅga' and the elaborate discussion about the nature and significance of 'Pūrvaraṅga' itself. Thus, Nāṭya is ultimately 'Rasa'. In order to make the 'Sahṛdaya' experience 'Rasa' through 'Bhāva', the performer is required to delineate Bhāva through delineation of the Vibhāvas,

Anubhāvas and Sañcārins. This necessitates the exposition of 'Bhāvas' after 'Rasa'.

Bhāvas cannot be communicated without 'Abhinaya'. This is the reason why after the exposition of 'Rasa' and 'Bhāvas', there is the exposition of 'Abhinaya' in NŚ.

Since Nāṭya is primarily a visual form and needs body-language, hence 'āṅgika' comes first. A very broad treatment has been given to 'Āṅgikābhinaya'. The 'Āṅgika' has several layers of contextual meaning inherent in the text. This contextual framework is an essential pre-requisite for understanding the classification of the body into 'Aṅgas', 'Upāṅgas' (the main and subsidiary limbs of the body) and their 'viniyoga' ('uses', 'usages', 'applicability'), the sign-language, based on their varied movements and postures.

Kapila Vatsyayan's remarks are important in this regard, "the principle of 'Viniyoga' allows variation and creation of a fairly free vocabulary of acting and expression in drama (Nāṭya). An analysis of several 'viniyogas' of the specific movements of a 'limb' or 'part' reveals that they are neither realistic imitations of human, animal and plant life nor the flourish of arms and hands as supplementary embellishments which serve as aids to songs.

"While some are pictorial in their approach, others are incorporated from contemporary ritual (thus the use of both 'patākahastas' as 'Añjali')."

"Many explore directional space, and others are evolved as a result of a careful observation of nature. The principle of establishing correlatives and correspondences is integral to the system at every juncture. This is the strength of 'Abhinaya' which today distinguishes Indian dance forms from all others."[3]

She goes deeper into body kinetics and relates it to the cosmogonic meaning inherent in the sacrificial altars in the Vedic yajñas, and explains the forms in a wider cosmogonic and philosophical terminology of Indian theatre. Finally, related to the general notion

of performance are 'aṅgakarma' or 'upāṅgakarma', the specific acts or the ways of using major and minor limbs for expressing dramatic meaning.

We next turn to the underlying principle of the 'Āṅgikābhinaya' which broadly governs the very use of body language.

Sāmānyābhinaya

The NŚ, at the beginning of the eighth chapter, underlines the three integral elements ('Vastu') of the 'Āṅgika'. Nṛtta (pure dance), Śākhā (lit. Branch, the movements of face, thighs, arms, shanks, feet etc. made in due order in the manner of branches of a tree) and, Aṅkura (lit. 'sprout', the generative or imaginative acting). Nṛtta, as an element of Nāṭya, has been given a very elaborate treatment in numerous chapters beginning with 8th and ending with 12th, whereas 'śākhā' and 'aṅkura' have been defined aphoristically in the 'Sāmānyābhinaya' chapter. 'Śākhā' and 'aṅkura', together with 'vākya', 'sūcā', 'nivṛttyaṅkura', and 'nāṭyāyita', form the central aspect of the Āṅgika-sāmānya-abhinaya in the performance of Sanskrit drama. NŚ offers a penetrating insight into the 'sāmānyābhinaya' and the 'citrābhinaya' in 22nd and 25th chapters respecitvely (Baroda edition) in their syntactical aspect.

This 'abhinaya'-syntax is based on the device of employing the various elements of 'vāk-karma' and 'aṅga-karma' together with such emotive manifestations as the 'sāttvikabhāvas', 'romāñca' (a thrill, horripilation), 'vaivarṇya', (change of colour or complexion, paleness), 'vepathu', (trembling) etc., and the 'sattvikālaṅkāras': 'bhāva', (feelings), 'hāva', (ordinary expressions from feeling), 'hela' (graceful expressions arising from the ordinary feelings), etc. They are arranged by a very flexible logic which offers innumerable artistic ways of expressing the meaning of the theatrical text. This logic of permutation and combination is termed 'miśra' by Kohala, as we will discuss. The 'sāmānyābhinaya' represents the very general aspect of

the 'abhinaya'. For instance, the emotion of love (rati), manifests itself in 'hāva', 'bhāva', 'helā', etc., which may be observed in the ordinary behaviour of young girls with only minor differences in mode of expression from girl to girl. It is the same with the verbal and corporeal expression. Although the 'sāmānyābhinaya' represents the general aspect of the 'abhinaya', it may express a very specific meaning through the logic of 'paurvāparya' (the sequence of prior and posterior) and the device of 'miśratva' (blending or mixing various elements of Abhinaya) in order to express the ultimate poetic meaning embodied in the 'rasa'.

The meaning of the term 'sāmānyābhinaya' has been variously understood. While Manomohan Ghosh renders it as 'homogenous acting', Kapila Vatsyayan prefers to call it 'basic abhinaya'. Bharata Gupta translates it as 'mixing' and takes 'samānīkaraṇa' as the unification of various elements of performances.[4]

Abhinava-bhāratī offers important insights based on meanings inherent in the term. According to Abhinava 'sāmānyābhinaya' may be understood as a mode of 'Abhinaya' in which different elements or components of 'Abhinaya', i.e. 'Āṅgika', 'Vācika' and 'Sāttvika', and other elements are combined harmoniously. He explains this aspect of 'Abhinaya' through a remarkable image where the actor is compared to a perfumer (kirāṭa). A perfumer, after having brought the sweet smelling substances from the merchants' stall, makes a homogeneous mixture while saying to himself, so much so of this one and that one first and so on and, thus, makes a wonderful perfume. In the same way a performer combines his acquired skills, blending them inwardly, to give a wonderful performance. This imagery of the perfumer underlines the process in which an artist freely creates according to his own experience of 'life' (loka), acquisition of the śāstric tradition (Veda) and choice out of the norms laid down for communicating a particular emotion of situation (Adhyātma). It also emphasizes the freedom of artist's own innovations and experimenta-

tions, underlying the actor's own judgement in selection of conventional techniques on one hand and creating ever fresh on the other. This may be seen as corresponding to the concept of 'Manodharma'.[5]

Abhinava goes on to offer another equally important image of a 'firebrand' (Alātacakra) fastly moving in a circle. This fast movement gives an impression that it is not a torch or torches but a complete, undivided circle of fire. Such is the case with the mixing of different elements of 'Abhinaya'. We have already seen that a performance may be understood in terms of 'kriyā'. The successive moments of action, when seen in a continuity, appear as one unified action. So, 'abhinaya', although taking place in a succession, appears as one unified act. This is another side of 'sāmānyābhinaya'.

This image of 'Alātacakra' suggests the underlying temporal aspect of cyclical rhythm as well as representation. This homogenous and unified enactment is at the same time 'unique' ('anya', literally, 'different') because it is extremely pleasant. The interpretation offered above is based on the understanding of 'sāmānya' as 'the fact of being 'sama' (in equilibrium, i.e. harmony or unified) and 'Anya' (unique). The word 'sāmānya' occurring in the compound 'sāmānyabhinaya' may be interpreted in other ways as well. 'Sāmānyabhinaya' may be interpreted in other ways as well. 'Sāmānya' may, therefore, be taken to be basic or essential or universal aspect of the 'abhinaya'.[6]

Abhinava-bhāratī further refers to the view of the ancient Ācāryas following Kohalamata. According to them this aspect of 'Abhinaya' may be understood in terms of—(1) śiṣṭa, (2) kāma, (3) miśra, (4) vakra, (5) sambhūta; and (6) ekavākyatva.

'Śiṣṭa' (supplementary) refers to 'what has been left out' in the previous chapters on 'abhinaya' that has been dealt with here, i.e. XXII chapter, because it enunciates the application aspect of the same 'abhinaya'. It should be noticed that Abhinava himself considers 'Citrābhinaya' to be supplementary to the 'sāmānyābhinaya'.[7]

It is almost impossible to deal with all the common aspects of all the 'bhāvas'; therefore, 'sāmānyābhinaya' for 'kāma' which is the most pervasive psychic state, observed not only in human behaviour but even in the instincts of animals and insects, has been enunciated. This explains why 'sāttvika-bhāvas' are explained only in terms of 'love'. It also implies that 'sāmānyābhinaya' of rest of the 'bhāvas' can be understood by analogy. It is also 'miśra' or of the nature of combination as has already been explained in the image of perfume-making.[8]

It is 'vakra' or ornate proving a certain degree of embellishment. This raises 'abhinaya' from 'svabhāva' (naturalness) to 'vakratā' (artistic embellishment).[9]

It is again 'sambhūta', literally 'together', i.e. performed simultaneously or collectively. All the fourfold 'abhinayas' and other elements such as music etc. occur simultaneously. Hence combination is evident in the 'sāmānyābhinaya'. But each of the four 'abhinayās' may be a performed one by one for elaborative presentation, ultimately, 'abhinaya' culminates in a combined performance.

It also has the nature of 'ekayuktatva' (literally, "having singleness"). It means, while āṅgika, vācika and 'sāttvika' occur in perfect harmony and combination, they are done single also.[10] When done together they appear like an 'Alātacakra' (fire-circle), but when done singly the subtle nuances of each one are elaborated.

The 'sāmānyābhinaya' can also be divided into parts. There are emotional (sāttvika), corporeal (śārīra) and verbal (vācika) channels of sāmānyābhinaya. The 'sāttvika sāmānyābhinaya' is well-known as 'hāva', 'bhāva', 'helā', etc.[11] 'Sattva' means 'manas' or the mind and no 'abhinaya' can attain its height unless it is 'sattvaniṣṭha' grounded in 'sattva'. 'Sāttvikābhinaya' cannot be done with a wavering and a restless mind. Therefore, 'resting in one's own being, i.e. Sattva', is essential for a powerful acting and the enactment of the 'sāttvikābhāvas' is considered to be the touchstone or the test for the actor.

After the 'sāttvika sāmānyābhinaya' the sixfold 'śārīra-sāmānyābhinaya', namely 'vākya', 'sūcā', 'aṅkura', 'śākhā', 'nāṭyāyita' and 'nivṛttyaṅkura' have been taught. 'Vākyābhinaya' is the corporeal acting simultaneous with the verbal enactment of the Sanskrit and Prākṛta texts in verse and prose, endowed with the 'rasa' and 'bhāva'.[12] 'Sūcā' is the mode of 'śārīra-sāmānyābhinaya' in which the inner reflection of the actor is expressed through gesture and followed by 'vākyābhinaya'. Thus it is called 'sūcā' (literally, 'suggestive', 'indicative') or 'sūcī', 'needle', i.e. the one which pierces through the time and enacts the text, leading to the text being corporeally uttered.[13] Abhinavagupta points out that the object of the 'sūcā' is suggesting the theme (vastu) being reflected upon (vimarśa' or 'abhisandhāna') by the actor.

'Aṅkura' (sprout) is the mode of 'abhinaya' that reveals through pure gesture the latent multilayered meaning of the poetic text, without uttering the words.[14] It unfolds the meaning inherent in the text that is visualised by the artist according to his own genius (pratibhā). It can only be performed by a proficient artist ("nipuṇasādhya"). Thus 'aṅkura' is essentially of the nature of 'sūcā' which is deeply rooted in reflection (vimarśa), but differs from it in the sense that it opens the door for an endless elaboration.

The NŚ underlines the fact that 'aṅkura' is brought about through generation ('utpatti'), i.e. spontaneous rise of new meaning as 'bhāvas', ideas and situations expressed through transmissions, permutations and combinations. An equivalent 'utpatti', 'upaja' is even now prevalent in musical terminology of North India. Śārṅgadeva and Kallinātha have clearly enunciated the distinction between 'sūcā' and 'aṅkura'. Although both belong to the category of 'imaginative acting', 'sūcā' precedes the sentence to be delivered (bhāvi-vākya-viṣayiṇī) and 'aṅkura' elaborates the innermost meaning of the sentence already uttered (bhūta-vākya-viṣaya).

'Śākhā' (branch) is the Abhinaya performed through the head, face, thighs, hands and legs with the predominance of 'vartanā'

(specific treatment given to the movements of these limbs).[15] The same term 'Bartāva' i.e. 'Bartāva' of the 'svaras' etc., occurs in the North Indian musical terminology.

If body is viewed as a trunk, the hands etc. may be seen as its branches (śākhā).

The 'nāṭyāyita' is the ingenious device to express various levels of time by a play within a play. It also includes 'abhinaya' of the 'dhruvās' employed by the performer (prayoktṛ).[16] It is called 'nāṭyāyita' because though not independently a full-fledged play or the direct play, it functions like a play. 'Nāṭyāyita' means "that which resembles a 'nāṭya'." When a drama within a drama takes place, drama proper is the real drama, whereas the other drama within the fold of drama, appears to be, but is not an independent drama. 'Nāṭyāyita' is, therefore, a type of 'simili-drama' or 'pseudo-drama'.[17] Abhinava compares it with a dream within a dream. This variety of 'nāṭyāyita' is termed as 'rūpakaniṣṭha' (based on a play).

The other kind of 'nāṭyāyita' is one when the 'abhinaya' takes place simultaneously with the rendering or recitation (gāna) of a 'dhruvā' song. It occurs, for instance, when there is an entry or an exit of the character. This form of 'nāṭyāyita' is employed in order to heighten the theatricality of the entries and exits, for the actor who is to appear immediately after the 'dhruvā' as this particular character, first delineates the poetic and metaphoric meaning of the 'Dhruvā'.

It is called, according to Abhinava, 'kāryāntaraniṣṭha', "rooted in the initiative of someone else (who is not the poet), i.e. of the prayoktṛ."[18]

It may be stated here that a 'Dhruvā' describes the character with a symbol. For instance in describing the 'Apsarases', friends of Urvaśī in Vikramorvaśīya', Kālidāsa employs the metaphor of sad geese, wandering in search of their friend, i.e. Urvaśī.

Thus, the first variety of nāṭyāyita is a theatrical device employed in Sanskrit drama to simultaneously express different levels of time.

The second variety is meant for projecting two aspects of the theatre, the one based on the drama-text written by playwright or received from the oral tradition, and the other one sometimes given by the play-wright himself as an addition to the text of drama and sometimes introduced by the Sūtradhāra or the performer. Thus, this second variety of 'nāṭyāyita' related to 'Dhruvā' is called as 'simple' drama or 'pseudo-drama' because the text is technically not written by the playwright. It is a 'non-drama' which is regulating the proper drama. Therefore, 'non-drama' assumes the role as if it is primary drama.

The 'Nivṛttyaṅkura' is the form of acting when a character does not respond through the speech, but rather reacts to dialogue or the dramatic situation through gestures. It is called 'Nivṛttyaṅkura' because it is a spontaneous imaginative and responsive 'abhinaya' when there is the suspension ('nivṛtti') of the character's own dialogue.[19] It lasts as long as there is more than one actor on the stage.

Vācika-sāmānyābhinaya is the presentation of a very general aspect of the language-use. It includes conversation or talking (ālāpa), prattling (pralāpa), lamenting (vilāpa), repeated speaking (anulāpa), dialogue (saṁlāpa), Supressing or concealing the words by alteration of the words spoken before (apalāpa), message (sandeśa), agreement, for example, by saying "You have said what was uttered by me" (atideśa), specific mention (nirdeśa), pretext (vyapadeśa), instruction (upadeśa) and indirect communication (apadeśa).[20]

From another angle, such general aspect of the use of speech may be categorised as 'pratyakṣa' (direct) and 'parokṣa' (indirect) or as related to the present, past and future time, or as 'ātmastha' or 'parastha'.

'Abhinaya' may be classified again as either 'Ābhyantara', "interior to the NŚ", i.e., conforming to its rules, or 'Bāhya', "exterior to it", when it is done freely. The 'Abhinaya' which is performed by physical efforts, that are not silent, hurried or complex and that rest on proper tempo (laya), time (tāla) and measurement of 'kalās', and in

which words are distinctly uttered without harshness and hurry, is called 'ābhyantara'. When it is of the opposite kind, observing free movements and not being combined with songs and instrumental music, it is called 'bāhya'.

Thus, although it becomes clear that the Sanskrit theatre is mainly a training-oriented one, a theatre activity, which would blossom outside the sphere of regular training and flow spontaneously in life is not ruled out. This lengthy aspects of Sanskrit theatre that are repeatedly referred to in the accounts of the play productions are found in the works of Kālidāsa, Dāmodaragupta and Kallinātha.

Citrābhinaya

'Citrābhinaya' is complementary to the 'sāmānyābhinaya'. Abhinava-bhāratī makes a distinction between the 'sāmānya' and 'citra' abhinaya on the ground that the 'sāmānyābhinaya' is meant for the delineation of the 'bhāvas' or the emotive states, whereas the 'citrābhinaya' is employed for the portrayal of the 'vibhāvas', either 'ālambanas' (stimuli) or 'uddīpanas' (i.e., environment).[21]

One may wonder in what way the 'abhinaya' of the 'bhāvas' differs from the 'abhinaya' of natural events and objects like sunrise, sky, etc. Although the basic semiotic of the fourfold 'abhinaya' is the same, it is the actual way of employing them which differs in the two cases.

As in normal life, emotive states, stimuli, and environment are intertwined, so it happens in the realm of 'abhinaya'. Although the complementary nature of the 'sāmānya' and 'citra' 'abhinaya' may be clearly seen in any excellent performance of the traditional 'nāṭya' or 'nṛtya', the threefold 'sāmānyābhinaya', particularly the 'sāttvikābhinaya', the 'sūcā', the 'aṅkura' and other kinds of 'āṅgika-sāmānyābhinaya', is predominantly employed in expressing the 'bhāvas'. An illustration from Kuḍiyāṭṭam may be cited here. For delineation of Vibhāvas, 'Kailāsoddharaṇa', in which Rāvaṇa lifts mount Kailāsa, is elaborately delineated and the objects established. The actor establishes and lifts the mountain through āṅgikābhinaya,

and then proceeds to play with it by tossing it up in sky and catching it in hands as if playing with a ball. The imaginative representation of the 'vibhāva' is preceded by the casual enactment of bhāvas. During the 'vibhāva' representation, there is mixture of the elaborate delineation of the sañcārins. It ends with 'bhāvābhinaya', but predominantly it may be taken as an example of 'citrābhinaya'. 'Sāmānyābhinaya' may be seen in the enactment of 'bhāvas' forming the main theme of the play.

NŚ and the Abhinava-bhāratī lay emphasis on the specificity (viśeṣa) of the 'aṅgakarma' and 'upāṅgakarma' as well as on the 'sāttvika' and 'vācikābhinaya' in the 'citrābhinaya'. The specific 'hastas' (hand postures) etc., have been prescribed in order to express a particular object or natural event. But the basis of distinction between 'sāmānya' and 'citra' abhinaya is founded respectively on the distinction of 'bhāva' and 'vibhāva'. 'Vibhāva' is the vision of the "other", i.e., 'ālambana', on whom the emotive state depends, for instance, the person one loves, and 'uddīpana' is the stimulant, the favourable environment and conditions.

Thus the same 'Abhinaya', which communicates and concretises the abstract emotive states, is able to represent the most concrete objects of nature. Therefore, this denomination of Abhinaya is taken to be 'citra' (wonderful). This clear distinction paves the way for a certain order of theatre practice in the delineation of the 'bhāva', 'vibhāva' and 'anubhāvas'.[22]

Vākyārthābhinaya and Padārthābhinaya

We have already stated that 'nāṭya' is essentially poetic meaning, i.e. Rasa presented by the single unbroken sentence communicated through body language. Like a verbal sentence in all of its various parts it conveys meaning, but unable as utterance, it transmits the deeper sentiments of emotions through different gestures and expressions, which enact both the words and sentences of the source-text.

The 'abhinaya' communicates the whole, undivided meaning, which is 'rasa'. The level of abhinaya is called 'vākyārthābhinaya' or 'rasābhinaya'. It is reached gradually through the 'abhinaya' of each meaningful word ('pada'), and even parts of the words. An 'abhinaya' at this level is 'padārthābhinaya', as well as 'prakṛtyārthābhinaya' ('Abhinaya' of the meaning of the original base of a word which is used in the language by addition of the affixes), and 'pratyayārthābhinaya' or the atomic meanings of the affixes. This level of 'abhinaya' is called 'bhāvābhinaya', and includes 'vibhāvābhinaya'. The peak of the 'abhinaya' is 'rasābhinaya', the supreme objective of traditional Indian theatre.

Continuity of Nāṭyaśāstra Tradition and Kuḍiyāṭṭam

The history of the performance of Sanskrit drama has been reconstructed on the basis of references available in Sanskrit literature and its commentaries. Numerous scholars such as V. Raghavan, S.K. De, and Kapila Vatsyayan have offered good summaries of the development of this art form, but an attempt to analyse the accounts given by Kālidāsa, Dāmodara Gupta and Kallinātha still awaits the attention of the scholars. These accounts also provide a continuity of the performance-tradition through centuries; and it will be interesting to view the contemporary play performance in Kuḍiyāṭṭam from this angle. Kuḍiyāṭṭam presents the unique characteristics of the traditional theatre of Kerala. It is the only surviving tradition of Sanskrit theatre, but its links with the NŚ has been debated by the scholars. Some maintain that both Keralan Kuḍiyāṭṭam and Kathakali represent a tradition independent of the NŚ. They state that the 'anukaraṇa' in the NŚ tradition, is a physical imitation. 'Anukaraṇa' may be viewed in four ways according to them.[23]

(i) An imitation of the external appearance and behaviour of a known model. This is mime and tends mostly to evoke laughter, with the mimic looked upon as a clown or jestor.

(ii) Where a model is not readily available, an equivalent one is identified and its form and behaviour are conceived and given meaning. This is humanistic and applicable mostly to historical characters. In many dance forms and this imitation of form is adopted.

(iii) Where neither a model nor its equivalent is available, a form is given to a conceptual creation. This applies to mythological characters like the ten-headed Rāvaṇa or a pseudo-humanised bird like 'haṃsa', the swan.

(iv) The next, ultimate stage in anukaraṇa transcends the mimatic in all respects and attempts at meta-creation through imagination on the basis of the conceived form and behaviour.

After analysing 'anukaraṇa' in this way, they conclude that while NŚ makes use of former two kinds of anukaraṇa, Kathakali involves the latter two.

This argument is based on a gross interpretation and understanding of the NŚ. Nowhere in the NŚ is the theory of Nāṭya enunciated as 'anukaraṇa' in the sense of mimesis; and 'abhinaya' transcending the mimetic in all respects, is not confined only to Kathakali. Scholars characterise this type of 'Abhinaya' as "the meta-creation through imagination". It seems rather that it represents an elaborate creative process of performance known as 'anukīrtana' of 'bhāvas', and the main instrument adopted to attain this objective is that of the āṅgika sāmānyābhinaya as well as 'citrābhinaya' in the NŚ.

The techniques employed by Kuḍiyāṭṭam and Kathakali are similar to the devices taught in the Sāmānyābhinaya chapter of the NŚ. "Upaślokana" in Kuḍiyāṭṭam is one of these devices. So is 'manodharma' found in both Kathakali and Kuḍiyāṭṭam. Similarly, the 'āṅgikābhinaya' and the elaborate 'netrābhinaya', preceding the dialogue in Kuḍiyāṭṭam, as well as the elaboration of the expressive and suggested meaning of the dialogue text are nothing but 'sūcā' and 'aṅkura'. 'Sūcābhinaya' is regarded as the very life and soul of

abhinaya. Had there not been in Kerala the lone surviving tradition of Sanskrit theatre which is Kuḍiyāṭṭam, the performative aspects of 'sūcā' and 'aṅkura' could not have been made known. Therefore, Kuḍiyāṭṭam and Kathakali do not represent a nāṭya tradition completely dissociated from the NŚ. On the contrary, they reflect its continuity.

As far as the different place and mode of the 'vācika', the use of 'mudrās' (hand gestures) different from those which have been enlisted in the NŚ and the costume and the make-up used in Kathakali are concerned, all these differences may be explained by changes in a tradition over the course of time, and by diffusion and diversity arising from the assimilation of regional variations. Kuḍiyāṭṭam is purely a Sanskrit theatre tradition that preserves the very old mode of 'vācika' according to the instructions laid down in the NŚ. The device of 'karṣaṇa' or elongation of the 'vācika' provides room for simultaneous 'āṅgikābhinaya' which ultimately culminates into 'vākyārthābhinaya' mentioned by Dāmodara Gupta, Abhinavagupta and Śārṅgadeva. The 'vācika' of Kuḍiyāṭṭam cannot be taken to be the only mode of 'vācika' taught in the NŚ, rather there seem to have been innumerable modes of 'vācika' spread all over India that survive in contemporary folk theatre traditions. The 'Nālāvṛtti' or repeating four times the dialogue/text in Kuḍiyāṭṭam is definitely a very old form. Dāmodara Gupta of Kashmir appears to be aware of this sort of 'vācika'. This also indicate that 'Nālāvṛtti' as a mode of 'vācika' was known in Kashmir from an early period. It may be observed that such a 'vācika' style may be employed either in the minimal scripts, such as the texts of Bhāsa plays preserved in Kuḍiyāṭṭam tradition, or in other plays of Kuḍiyāṭṭam tradition, or in a drama-performance taking place, act by act, over a number of days. We can simply guess that the maximal text like those of Kālidāsa, Śūdraka, Viśākhadatta and Bhavabhūti presented continuously in one day or one night, or even in several sessions, had a different and more rapid mode of 'vācika'.

The intonate aspect of 'vācika' in Sanskrit drama presents another difficulty. How did the actor capture the intonation of Sanskrit and Prākṛta dialogues when Sanskrit and Prākṛta ceased to be the language of daily use.

Rajaśekhara gives some clues to help solve this problem. He observes that the people in different regions spoke and recited the text with the intonation of their mother tongue. Thus the 'vacika' in Kuḍiyāṭṭam may reveal some aspects which are very old and mentioned in the NŚ, as well as others that have their roots in the region of Kerala.[24]

It has also been held that the Kathakali system of abhinaya is based on the control over 'prāṇa' and 'rasavāyu'. It is fundamentally different from the Nāṭya-śāstric system of 'abhinaya' which maintains supermacy of 'sāttvikābhinaya', such as 'vaivarṇya' (change of colour of the face, i.e. turning pale), or 'romāñca' (horripilation). These cannot be expressed by the Kathakali actor, whose facial make up is so thick and whose constume is made of thick loose jacket.

But such objections also cannot be entertained. Abhinava-bhāratī refers to the importance of life controlling 'prāna' or 'breath'. This control over the vital breath is an imperative for proficiency in 'sāttvikābhinaya' which is supreme in 'abhinaya'. It is therefore central in 'abhinaya', and is in quite consonance with NŚ tradition. In spite of a very elaborate 'āhārya', the Kuḍiyāṭṭam and Kathakali actors very successfully show the 'sāttvika' such as 'vaivarṇya' etc. Horripilation does not necessarily need to the actual raising of the hairs, for it may be done in other ways, such as expressing thrill through facial expressions. Thus, both Kathakali and Kuḍiyāṭṭam are not entirely independent of Nāṭyaśāstric tradition. They have been developed from the same Sanskrit theatre tradition which has been essentially a poetic theatre, for Sanskrit dramatists have always been recognized as poet-playwrights.

Kuḍiyāṭṭam has preserved in an astonishing measure the 'Purvaraṅga' or preliminaries of Sanskrit drama, which simply shows

that the theatre practice prevalent among the artists has survived, even if forgotten by some of the post-Nāṭya-śāstra śāstrakārās.

Theatrical Space and Spectacle-Audience Relationship

The concept of space and the relationship of the artist with the audience in the traditional theatre is fundamentally different from that of Western theatre in general, and proscenium theatre in particular. The NŚ describes three varieties of 'Prekṣāgṛha': the rectangular, the square, and the traingular one. Fourth one, i.e. circular, is mentioned by Śāradātanaya. There are only these four possibilities of using the horizontal space in theatre. The discovery of 'Kuḍiyāṭṭam' for the modern scholarship, and the consequential study of 'Kutambalam', the traditional auditorium of Kuḍiyāṭṭam, not only gave impetus to the study of the Nāṭyaśāstric auditorium, but opened the door for a wider study of the theatrical space of the traditional Sanskrit and folk theatre. The artist-audience relationship of the proscenium theatre could be critically examined, and consequently a new vision of such a relationship emerged before the contemporary Indian theatre-men. Another aspect of the unique use of the theatrical space may be seen in the concept of 'kakṣyāvibhāga' or the division of the space available on 'Raṅgaśīrṣa' and 'Raṅgapīṭha'. This unique device of creating the space in keeping with needs of the dramatic text on stage is a flexible technique. It may be a symbolic representation of the city, or a forest, or a sea, and so on. This device of space division is a common convention of Indian paintings as well as sculptures.

Some Conventions and Devices

Sanskrit plays are replete with the directions given by the playwrights themselves. They not only refer to the use of 'dhruvās' and 'Paṭī', (hand held stage curtain) as well as of such conventions as 'Ākāśabhāṣita', (a technique of mono-acting in which a dialogue

may be presented by enactment of hearing words as if they are coming from the sky and then rendering them as they were supposed to be heard by the actor), Apavārita (concealed speech which the character conveys to the spectator by moving a little forward and then taking slight turn), etc., but offer a deep insight into the way entry and exit took place and the props were used. All such devices and conventions are preserved in our contemporary traditional classical and folk theatre and dance forms. The elaborate description of the performance aspect of Sanskrit in later śāstric texts, commentaries on śāstric and dramatic texts, sculptures and paintings, substantiates this point.

Continuity and Change

Nobody would affirm that such a dynamic art form as theatre could remain static for centuries. Although drastic changes might have taken place during these centuries, the basic conventions and modes of the Nāṭyaśāstric performance have survived. Therefore, the 're-discovery' of Sanskrit drama and traditional dance-forms has been made possible by the great exponents of the respective forms. This continuity helps us comprehend and appreciate the original theatre of Bharata and Kālidāsa, and has definitely established the differences between Sanskrit theatre and its counterpart in its use and understanding aesthetic experience.

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LECTURE - III

IMPACT OF NĀṬYAŚĀSTRA AND THE CONTEMPORARY THEATRE PRACTICE

Emergence of Modern Indian Theatre

The encounter with the West during the eighteenth century had wide-ranging political, economic and cultural consequences. Greater interest in Sanskrit language, Indian thought and Indian Arts attracted European scholars and, later, scholars from U.S.A. and Japan. Apart from the honest and purely academic studies, which resulted in many important works, one cannot help recognize that in some cases the scholarly approach was vitiated by considerations inspired by colonial concerns and a sense of western superiority.

A new class, emerging in India with the strengthening of the company rule, was at work in creating a fresh theatre completely isolated from the traditional theatre-form. To alleviate boredom, British soldiers in Bombay, constructed a temporary theatre in the area known as Bombay Green in 1750. The theatre known as "Bombay Theatre" was made permanent in 1770. Historical records indicate that the Portuguese, who secured an even earlier foothold in India, in 1534 tried to discover a stage-format to propogate Christianity. The Gospel was preached by presenting what was known as 'Tamasha of Yeshu Masih', utilizing a new theatre format, complete with curtain, costumes, and a new kind of make-up.

The rise of cosmopolitan cities in India and the growing pace of British trade and commerce at the beginning of the industrial age gave rise to an urban middle class, attracted to Western theatre. In fact, an upheavel in social, political, economic, and cultural spheres took place, that led to a gradual disenchantment from whatever was Indian and a gradual alienation from the cultural roots.

India was soon divided into two spheres—one wanted to separate traditional roots and the other focussed on countering the aggressive attitudes of the former. A large area falling outside the influence of new urbanization was engrossed with the task of preserving the cultural inheritance.

An urban middle class was quickly developing in the newly organised sectors of Indian society. Some of these urban Indians wanted very much to reject the 'native' and embrace the 'new' while others although educated in the same system, resolved to meet this trendy onslaught with the weapon received from the agressors themselves. In this regard theatre, although rising from a completely alien cultural background, was sometimes used in the Indian struggle against the imperialist domination.

The continuity of the Sanskrit theatre in folk as well as classical traditions passed almost unnoticed by the rising middle class. The new theatre, sometimes emulating the proscenium theatre in general and the British Victorian theatre in particular marched ahead. Sometimes it was eclectically mixed with the form and content from local tradition.

After the withering away of the 'Inder Sabhā' on the one hand, a new movement started in the realm of playwriting and on the other new forms of theatre emerged in major cities such as Bombay and Calcutta. The history of such a development has been studied by several scholars and examined by Ashok Ranade in the current lecture series.[1] A fuller account of this theatre movement, and tendencies it reflected is found in Nemi Chandra Jain's "Indian theatre: tradition, continuity and change".[2]

There is, therefore, no need to survey the entire Indian theatre activity during the last century and a half. I wish to focus on major turning points in Hindi playwriting, and in contemporary theatre-practice.

Major Turning Points in Hindi Playwriting and Contemporary Theatre Practice

Hindi playwriting will serve as the point of departure in the discussion of the history of Hindi drama. Let us begin with Bharatendu. He is a playwright, who consciously and creatively responds to changing scenes. His roots lie deep in the tradition; yet he responds to challenges of the modern drama. He translated Sanskrit dramas into Hindī, and wrote numerous plays in Hindī.

It is significant that he retains traditional forms and content of the Indian theatre, but at the same time, injects new blood into them. The structure of Sanskrit drama, which survives even in our popular folk forms, has been discussed previously. The plays of Bharatendu illustrate well the continuity of Sanskrit drama in modern playwriting.

Bharatendu creatively responds to the needs and challenges of time, but seeks the answer to fundamental gestures in the tradition itself, as a playwright having a deep insight into life and theatre. Synthesizing the talents of a great playwright and theatreman has enabled him to evolve a truly dramatic language and a structure of drama in conformity with the traditional theory of dramaturgy and the needs of the contemporary reality and the new theatre movement.

Hindi playwriting took a new turn from the time of Jaya Shankar Prasad. Prasad's writings are marked with a paradox, reflecting his deep insight into the nature of past events. He presented his insights into history in order to creatively encounter the forcesof the imperialist domination and affirm his commitment with the tradition.

It is evident from some of his essays that he was aware of the nature of Sanskrit theatre. But strangely enough, he was also influenced by the Aristotelian norms in his playwriting. Moreover, he wrote plays inspired by Romanticism, and everywhere stressed dialogue, characterization and conflict. In the same way, the scenic division followed the formal western schemes.

However, the plays of Prasad interact with the tradition in a unique way. His clear vision of the history and culture of the contemporary reality expose them to the dramatic structure derived from the alien sources. The same perception of reality might have been responsible for his borrowing elements from the 'Parsi' theatre, namely, the songs, which conformed his Romantic vision of things. But, at the same time, he was fully aware of changing hard realities and emerging new aspirations. Prasad's plays occupy a unique place in the modern Indian playwriting.

Another phase of Hindī drama starts with the playwright Bhuvaneshwar and continues upto Upendra Nath 'Ashq'. Bhuvaneshwar tried to uncover the stark reality hidden behind the shell of cultural and ethical glitter. This genre of Hindī drama, whether it is a one-act drama or a full length play, concentrated on social reality. Structurally, it was completely different from the traditional Sanskrit and folk plays, had little connection with the traditional drama and theatre.

The proscenium theatre with its naturalistic and realistic mode of expression arose and then exhausted its possibilities by the middle of this century. A kind of creative stagnation was realized in the naturalistic and realistic modes of theatre not only in India, but also in Europe. Hence, a search for a new theatre started. In Europe, Brecht was attracted to Eastern theatre, and several other directors were looking to Indian theatre for inspiration. Concurrently in India, a search for the 'identity' of the Indian theatre was taking place in the 1960s. It resulted into a new turn in Hindī playwriting. Dharmavir Bharati and Laxmi Narayana Lal, two Hindi playwrights, started experimenting in two different directions in the search for a new dramatic text. Bharati turned to the Mahābhārata and Lal to Indian folk-tradition. Hindī play-wrightes had used epic themes previously, but the approach of Bharati towards the legends was altogether different; and the form of drama he evolved was fresh and potent.

A new language of drama with a powerful recitative quality and theatricality is the hall-work of his well-known play 'Andhāyuga' which accurately illustrates the imagination of theatremen. Duṣyanta followed his lead. Laxmi narayana Lal was also in theatre in the 50s and 60s and enthusiastically worked for Hindī theatre in Allahabad. His attention was drawn towards the Hindi folk tradition. His close ally in theatre Dr. Satyavrata Sinha was already involved with the folklore studies.

The search for the identity of the Indian theatre blossomed in the direct encounter of a theatreman like Habib Tanvir with the powerful theatre form of Eastern Madhya Pradesh. Tanvir was a pioneer in infusing an altogether new force in Hindī theatre with a team of theatre artists who were tribals and peasants belonging to that region and inheriting the tradition directly from previous generations.

Artists hailing from the soil and having firsthand encounter with traditional art forms began to collaborate with these counterparts from the urban middle class who were educated and trained in an alien theatre. The result gave a fresh new look to Hindī theatre. Tanvir leaned heavily on his own tradition of theatre and a 'New theatre' appeared, born from this message.

The dilemma of a Hindi playwright like Bharati was rooted in his perception of the contemporary reality and in his resolution to express it in an idiom derived from an alien structure of drama and mixed with the Indian mythology and its new interpretation. He introduced a structure of play similar to that of the'Sūtradhāra-oriented' play, but fundamentally deriving its inspiration from the Greek pattern of 'Chorus'.

From Rakesh onward, a number of Hindi playwrights have intended to reflect the changed reality as well as to present Indian drama sometimes by relying on Indian legend, and history, and sometimes approaching the social reality directly within the parameters of proscenium theatre.

Although an enormous liberty has been taken in interpreting the traditional myths and legends, resulting in an altogether new meaning being superimposed on them, the use of myth, legend, folk themes as metaphors for contemporary situations has illustrated new possibilities for Hindi drama. Nemi Chandra Jain summarizes this influence of traditional theatre on Hindi plays during this period by saying "It has been possible to bring, as characters in the plays, animals, birds, trees and other elements from the natural and supernatural, the very day and the imaginary, the human and non-human reality."[3]

The indirect and remote impact of the Nāṭyaśāstra on Hindi playwriting has given rise to a new genre of play which, Nemi Chandra Jain rightly notices, "many elements of the traditional scripts have been incorporated, at many levels of imagination and artistic quality."[4] As a result, "most of these plays have a flexible structure in which various threads of the story or the dramatic action are linked together by a narrator called Sūtradhāra, Bhāgavata or Vācaka."[5]

Impact of Nāṭyaśāstra and Traditional Theatre on Contemporary Theatre-Practice

The impact of the Nāṭya-śāstra and traditional theatre, including that of Sanskrit theatre, is most pronounced on the contemporary theatre practice. The flexibility of the "Performance Text", giving room to the introduction of a single narrator or of a number of narrators and singers, has given theatremen immense scope for 'vācika', as an experiment with themes and techniques from the Sanskrit and folk theatre. New modes of speech, recitation, narration, and songs have evolved in order to break the linear, naturalistic speech. The fusion of the Greek 'Chorus' with traditional 'Sūtradhāra' and 'Narrator' has also occurred.

Early Greek theatre was no more than a dancing circle marked out around an altar. This altar "stood in the centre of that circle,

called orchestra, round which the spectators grouped themselves, leaving a wedge-shaped space open for chorus of Dionysus priests to come in procession from the nearby temple to the altar in order to worship and perform."[6]

"The Dionysiac cult evoked ecstatic rapture in which the participants felt themselves transformed into other beings such as satyrs and meanads. The dithrambic songs evoked happenings of ancient times. When singing reached the maximum of intensity the vision in the song was transferred to the auditorium."[7]

'Sūtradāra' and the 'vācika' of the contemporary theatre serve a function similar to that Greek 'Chorus'. The evocation of 'ecstatic rapture' approaches (but never quite reaches) the 'Rasa' experience. Nevertheless, this fusion of 'Sūtradhāra' and 'Chorus' is here to stay.

The group of actors have yet another function. They are usually trained not only in recitation and music, but also in basic dance movements and 'abhinaya'. They are therefore capable to create the environment and the situations, and to express inner emotive states of the characters. Sometimes they function as actors and sometimes as characters. This flexibility and fluidity brings the contemporary theatre close to the improvisational and imaginative 'abhinaya' of the Nāṭyaśāstric tradition. The major difference is that in Sanskrit theatre such performance is given by each actor, where as in modern theatre it is almost entirely confined to 'Chorus'. From Tanvir to Raina, a number of other directors, including Bansi Kaul, Karanth, Panikkar and Ratan Thiyam have had recourse to this device in different degrees and in various styles and forms.

"Proscenium theatre is a closed and condemned space", once observed Raina, whereas Sanskrit theatre has given a new vision of the use of the horizontal theatre-space. The deep study of the "Kutambalam" which has been carried out in the light of the NŚ by veteran scholars and theatre personalities like Govardhan Panchal has recreated a new understanding of theatre-space in keeping with

the multilevel, multi-zonal and flexible space taught in the chapter on 'Prekṣāgṛha' and 'Kakṣyā-vibhāga' of the NŚ. Shanta Gandhi, Panchal, Vijaya Mehta, and Kamalesh Datta Tripathi alongwith Prem lata Sharma and Vasudeva Smarta have utilized the 'Nāṭyaśāstric stage' in the performance of Sanskrit plays in the original or in translation. Other directors have followed the principle without bothering to create replica of the Nāṭyaśāstric stage.

The use of the minimal of the Nāṭyaśāstric āṅgika, especially 'hastas', in order to evolve a codified corporeal language to stage a Sanskrit drama may be seen in the productions of Shanta Gandhi and Pancal. They have assimilated the highly codified Nāṭyaśāstric āṅgika for the specic purpose of successfully presenting Sanskrit plays.

Panikkar, Pillai, and Ramanujan have accomplished the same effects by exploiting the theatrical forms of their respective regions.

Besides, remarkable experiments have been made to evolve a new theatre music for plays in general and Sanskrit plays in particular by Karanth, Panikkar, Ratan Thiyam, Chandavarkar, and a number of other directors and eminent music directors.

A large number of dance artists and exponents of different classical dance forms have presented Sanskrit plays through the medium of opera. Such experiments may open a new direction of the contemporary theatre activity.

A shift from the naturalistic pseudo-realistic representation, in order to create an illusion of the real, to the suggestive and imaginative depiction of the environment and the inner emotive states through āṅgika, and sāttvikābhinaya, lies at the very core of the experimenting modern theatre experimentation. The tools and devices, mentioned previously, were meant for delineating the 'bhāvas', 'vibhāvas', in evoking of 'rasa'. A number of tools and devices have been derived from Sanskrit and traditional folk theatre for the contemporary theatre to depict the situations and emotive states.

Traditional 'Nāṭya' and Modern Theatre

As noticed earlier, no distinction of 'nāṭya' and 'nṛtya' is discernible in the NŚ. However, the difference between 'naṭya' and 'nṛtta' is based on their relation to the 'written' or orally floating performance script. 'nāṭya' and 'nṛtya' artistically communicates the poetic meaning, whereas 'nṛtta' is pure dance, reflecting the joy of ordinary life. This is how Abhinava distinguished 'nāṭya' from 'nṛtta', 'nāṭya' as 'abhinaya' encompasses its four components beginning with 'āṅgika' and the different elements such as Vṛttis, Dharmīs, Ātodya and Gāna. Such a play offers an aesthetic experience known as 'Rasa'. An understanding of the relationship between man and man, man and universe, and the consequent insight into life—all follow the 'rasa experience'. In other words Sanskrit drama offers an integral 'Rasa' experience through the delineation of the 'vibhāvas', 'bhāvas', etc. At the same time it gives 'vyutpatti' (understanding, insight) into 'artha', 'kāma' and 'dharma'. The 'rasa' experience is the ultimate goal of theatre. It takes the spectator from life's fragmentary episodes to a holistic experience without ever escaping from life.

Modern theatre on the other hand is mainly a theatre of 'an understanding' and 'awareness' of the social reality and deeper human psyche with the objective of providing such an 'understanding' to the modern spectator is aimed at in contemporary performances. 'Rasa' may be subordinately present or altogether absent. These modern performances require adaptations of the performing script of traditional Sanskrit plays or their new translations. In order to relate it to contemporary reality, a modern theatre director will often try to interpret a traditional play by highlighting a particular point or an aspect of the textual meaning, or by introducing an altogether new meaning into it. An interpretation of the performance script through plot-analysis was also popular among the old commentators, Premedieval Sanskrit critics, like Kuntaka in his 'Vakroktijīvita' analyzed the plot of a number of plays, highlighting points and

junctures of the plot from the point of view of 'vakrokti' and the 'rasa' experience, as well as the beauty of the plot construction. The hermeneutics of traditional theatre does not require any alteration or adaptation of the written text, as is experienced in traditional performances of Kuḍiyāṭṭam.

The modern director tries to offer an experience of the entire script, 'the Prabandhārtha' within the limited time of two or three hours, whereas a traditional artist would not fall prey to such a constraint, utilizing several days if the play requires it. This elaboration of the performance has attracted the attention of even traditional critics. 'Naṭāṅkuśa', a treatise of 16th century, criticises the Kuḍiyāṭṭam performance from this point of view. Nevertheless, very often the 'bhāvā-nukīrtana'-oriented, and the 'rasa'-evocative dramas have been turned into plays simply meant for understanding the 'realities' of life in contemporary theatre, while traditional forms mostly remain 'rasa'-oriented. This conflicting approach results in two different views of the universe and of theatre, one from the Ancient India, and one from the Western perspective.

Identity of Indian Theatre: The Challenge

As an art-form, theatre is the only medium which tries to resolve the challenge of finding its artistic and aesthetic identity. There cannot be any ready-made or instant answer to such problems. It is certain that Indian theatre must achieve its 'identity' by responding to Sanskrit and traditional forms or the genius of Indian theatre will risk being lost in oblivion. The renewed challenges of the Post-modern, unipolar world demand a deeper reflection on the problem.

Contemporary Indian theatre's closeness to traditional theatre is not only important from the angle of obtaining its identity, but from the point of view of providing it a perennial source for discovering even newer forms for experimentation and innovation. Traditional, folk, tribal, and classical theatre forms must not only be preserved,

but also they must be allowed to grow, for they have emerged in their genuine and vital relationship with Indian reality and have never exhausted their power of innovation. An interaction between such a rich and vibrating tradition and the modern Indian theatre would culminate in the emergence of a powerful and meaningful modern Indian theatre. Such an interaction is vital for another reason. Modern Indian theatre has to answer the question of its relationship with ethnic theatre and forge its bonds with Pan-Asian theatre.

The Sanskrit theatre tradition answered this question in its own way and in its own tone. A meaningful dialogue between the classical and folk theatre streams has always existed in India. They have strengthened each other creatively. Moreover, the Sanskrit theatre tradition could establish certain fruitful bonds with the theatre traditions of Central Asia, South East Asia, and far East. Inclinations of modern Indian Theatre towards traditional Indian theatre could pave the way for more creative interaction with traditional Pan-Asian Theatre. Although theatre is facing a menacing threat from the electronic media today, there is a possibility and a creative need for preserving Indian theatre and its identity. The answer lies in a deeper relation of modern Indian theatre with the rich and still living tradition in the country. The strength derived from such an interaction will enable India to interect with the theatre the world over.

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